

**SOME BRITISH RECORDS OF  
OLETHRODOTIS MODESTUS (GRAVENHORST)  
(HYMENOPTERA: ICHNEUMONIDAE: CTENOPELMATINAE)**

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**Abstract**

The historically uncertain status of the ichneumonid wasp *Olethrodotis modestus* (Gravenhorst) as a British insect is reviewed, confirmed British records are provided, and recognition features are outlined. (Hymenoptera, Ichneumonidae, Ctenopelmatinae.)

**Introduction**

The ctenopelmatine tribe Olethrodotini contains two genera, one Western and the other Eastern Palaearctic, each with a single described species (Townes, 1970; Yu & Horstmann, 1997). The Western Palaearctic species, *Olethrodotis modestus* (Gravenhorst), has appeared on the most recent two British check lists covering Hymenoptera (Fitton et al., 1978; Kloet & Hincks, 1945, as *Taschenbergia*), but it appears that this was on the strength of its inclusion in 19th century works on British insects (Stephens, 1835, as *Tryphon evolans* Gravenhorst, from "near London, and in Salop"; Curtis, 1837, three entries as *Mesoleptus modestus* Gravenhorst, *Phytodietus microtamius* Gravenhorst, and *Tryphon evolans*, but only the latter indicated as being supported by a specimen in his collection; Marshall, 1872, as *Perilissus modestus*), rather than as a result of 20th century publications recognising British specimens. In particular, Morley (1915) omitted it both from the "Catalogue of the British Ichneumonidae" (pp. 369-400) that concluded his exhaustive account of British Ichneumonidae, and his (1911) treatment of the relevant group, referring to it (1911: 146, as *Tryphon evolans*; and 1911: 253 as *Perilissus modestus* (= *Mesoleptus modestus*)) only obliquely and not in a British context. As there do not appear to be published records of it as a British insect since the early part of the 19th century, when the basis for recognising it was, to say the least, shaky (most of the nomenclature and probably supposed specimens having depended on the relatively undistinctive male sex), and because it is generally considered to be rather a rare insect, albeit widespread in Europe (Aubert, 2000: 63), it seems worth listing data from the specimens of *O. modestus* we have recently examined in the collections of the Natural History Museum (BMNH) and the National Museums of Scotland (NMS), not least to establish its firm right to a place on the British list. In fact, there are a surprising number of British specimens in these two depositories, listed below in chronological order of capture, with exact transcription of label data:

1 ♂: Desvgn. 68-52 [printed] / modestus Gr. [printed] / un-named by Claude Morley 27 specimens CM iv.1911. (BMNH). Though lacking locality data this is presumably British, and the third label makes it clear that Morley was unable to

recognise this species (at least from the male sex). The label was evidently affixed only to the first specimen in a row of 27 and the other 26 specimens presumably belonged to other species and have been subsequently dispersed.

1 ♀: Lastingham, May 5, 1876, shore of brook nr Highfield [hand, on back of card mount] / British Isles / Marshall coll. 1904-120 / *Ischnoceros* / *rusticus* Fourcr. / *Taschenbergia modesta* Grav J.F. Perkins det III 1935. (BMNH). This specimen is referred to by Morley (1908: 14) as *Ischnoceros* [sic] *rusticus* (Fourcroy). Lastingham is in N. Yorkshire.

1 ♀: Oxford, Tubney, 1.v.04 / *Taschenbergia modesta* Grav. Det. J.F. Perkins 193[-]. (BMNH).

1 ♀: England, HT, Aldbury, 12.v.1951, R.B. Benson, BM 1951-583. (BMNH).

1 ♂: 63375 [hand] / Brit. Mus. 1953-259 / Scotland, Ross & Cromarty, Kinlochewe, 18.iv.1953, O.W. Richards / *Taschenbergia modesta* Grav det J.F. Perkins 1955. (BMNH).

1 ♀: Santon Downham, Norfolk. TL 818883. Malaise trap: heath with birch and pine. 16-25.5.1985 J. Field M RMSNH 1986.021. (NMS).

2 ♂: Amat, Easter Ross NH 4689 Mal. Tr. Native pinewood 5.1989 I. MacGowan NMSZ 1992.144. (NMS).

1 ♂: Beinn Eighe NNR, W. Ross NH 0064 Mal. Tr. Native pine 5.1989 I. MacGowan NMSZ 1992.143. (NMS).

4 ♂: Beinn Eighe NNR, W. Ross NH 015634 Mal. Tr. in birchwood 11-24.v.92 (2 ♂) and 12.5-21.6.92 (2 ♂) P.W. Brown NMSZ 1992.169. (NMS).

*O. modestus* seems to be univoltine, flying in May or as early as April. It appears never to have been reared. The sites from which the specimens in NMS came all include open heathy areas, as well as both conifers (*Pinus*) and deciduous trees (notably *Betula*).

*Olethrodotis modestus* is a medium-sized ichneumonid with a body length of about 10 mm. Once it is recognised as belonging to the subfamily Ctenopelmatinae, the female is immediately distinctive on account of its much longer ovipositor (sheath roughly as long as metasoma, about 0.85 as long as forewing) than any other British species of the subfamily apart from *Lathrolestes ensator* (Brauns) which differs in many respects, the easiest to express being its strongly pectinate claws (simple in *Olethrodotis*). Both sexes of *O. modestus* have eyes with sparse and rather short hairs, a character not found in any tribe of Ctenopelmatinae other than *Olethrodotini* which, as there is only one species of that tribe in the British fauna, is therefore also diagnostic (within the Ctenopelmatinae), although it is quite difficult to see and the male of *O. modestus* is in fact rather easily overlooked.

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### The generic names of the British Carabidae (Coleoptera) explained

I thought it might possibly be instructive, and not without interest, to run through a series of generic names giving their literal or original meanings where possible. Such names are among the stock-in-trade of entomologists, few of whom have any inkling of how they came about – except for the minority of names that bear their meanings on their surface. Nowadays, most of their users have “small Latin and less Greek” so that associative memory has little to work on, and analytical understanding tends to be slight.

The British Carabidae will serve well enough to illustrate a typically wide range of meanings. The names under consideration will be found to vary widely from the straight-forwardly descriptive – often marking some special feature – to the thoroughly obscure or apparently meaningless, though the latter type is rare. In any group of similar extent, there will always be found a few names that appear to have been bestowed quite arbitrarily, or whose significance is not (or no longer) at all clear; and others that seem downright unsuitable.